

Items #40: TSI Stocking Control

Evaluation Question: Are the Forest Plan projections of treatment for stocking control being met with Timber Stand Improvement treatment?

Methods: Acres of timber stand improvement

Data Sources: R1 Standard Report, Silvicultural Accomplishments 2006

Evaluation:

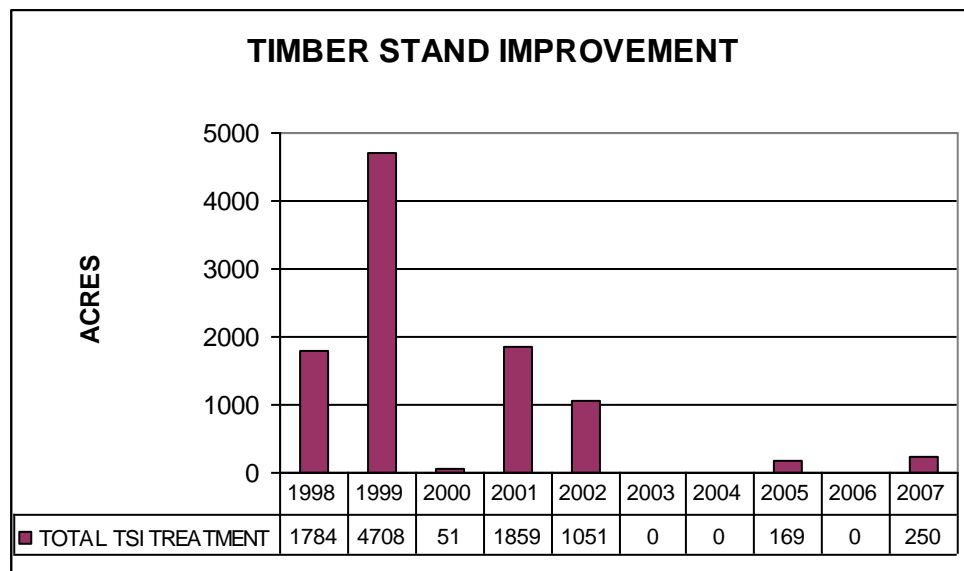


Figure 1: Timber Stand Improvement in acres from 1998 to 2007, Flathead NF

Timber stand improvement (TSI) treatment on the Flathead consists primarily of pre-commercial tree thinning. The funding for these treatments has steadily declined since the late 1990s, with no funding received during 2003, 2004 or 2006. This reduction in funding is in part due to the priority placed on post-fire reforestation in the budget allocation process, at the expense of tree improvement treatments.

The other major reason for a reduction in TSI funding was the listing of Canada lynx as a threatened species in 2000. The lynx conservation strategy severely restricts treatment of young, dense forest stands, as these stands provide habitat for snowshoe hare, an important food source for the lynx. These are the very stands that would benefit from timber stand improvement treatments, to reduce tree competition and provide for healthy young free-growing stands. Beginning in 2007, revised conservation guidelines allow for limited thinning of lynx habitat, in the wildland urban interface.

The average timber stand improvement treatment for the monitoring period is 987 acres, compared to 2817 acres in the prior monitoring report. This compares to the 1500 acres of pre-commercial thinning that was projected in the Forest Plan as amended. The trend is clear that

opportunity and funding for these treatments is very limited, and will likely be limited into the future.

Current thinning need on the forest is estimated at 23,100 acres. There continues to be an increasing backlog of areas which would benefit from reducing total tree stocking. In the absence of thinning, trees in these stands will have increasing competition, reduced growth, and be stressed and more susceptible to the effects of drought, and insect and disease activity. Eventually these stands may stagnate – in the case of lodgepole pine, “dog hair” thickets may result. Other stands with a mixture of tree species will eventually “self thin”, with smaller and less thrifty trees dying off, making room for other more dominant trees to grow.

Leaving these stands unthinned has short-term benefits in providing lynx feeding habitat, but will also have long-term consequences in terms of the health and growth of the forest landscape.

Recommended Actions: Continue to monitor